

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-DWASHINGTON TIMES
16 September 1985

Who's who of spying at his fingertips

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The defection of the Soviet Union's spymaster in the British Isles poses tremendous and enduring problems for General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and his intelligence apparatus in the West.

The problems grow out of the wide-ranging nature of the duties and authority of the chief of the KGB residency in London — a post held for three years by Oleg Gordievski, who is now revealed to have taken asylum in Britain.

The prompt British reaction to Mr. Gordievski's defection — expulsion of 25 Soviet diplomats he identified as KGB officers — is only the beginning of the trouble Soviet intelligence will have to try to contain.

What exactly were his duties, his authority? What, in short, does a KGB station chief in Western Europe's principal outpost really know?

For openers, the KGB resident in a foreign country is in complete charge of all KGB personnel in that country, undercover agents and their recruiters alike. When a new agent is nominated, the resident must "sign off" (give personal approval) to his or her recruitment.

Thus Mr. Gordievski, from the very nature of his duties from June 1982 until the date of his defection, is in a position to identify not only all Soviet intelligence officers under cover in Britain, but also to reveal the true identities of every British and foreign citizen recruited for espionage in the last three years.

Beyond the question of mere identification, Mr. Gordievski must also have some pretty good notions of the information gathered and turned over to the KGB for transmission to Moscow. By now, British intelligence must be sifting this store of vital data.

Mr. Gordievski, working under his diplomatic cover of counselor at the Soviet Embassy in London, was not limited in authority to supervi-

sion of KGB activities. He also had important liaison functions with Soviet military intelligence, GRU.

The GRU chief in London is under strict standing orders to coordinate his operations with the KGB chief. It follows, then, that Mr. Gordievski will be able to give British defense officials a very complete briefing on the extent to which their secrets have been compromised.

Moreover, Mr. Gordievski's familiarity with Communist espionage went beyond the Soviets' own network. Intelligence chiefs of all Eastern European satellites in a foreign country, as well as those of Cuba and

North Korea, are required to keep the KGB chief fully informed of their operations.

We can therefore expect to see a widening wave of sudden departures from London of Soviet satellite operatives who know they have been compromised.

In addition to his supervision of all espionage activity, Mr. Gordievski, as KGB chief, was responsible for all covert political action and "disinformation" in the United Kingdom. The British government will now learn the full extent to which the Soviets may have been intervening in their domestic politics, and this could be acutely embarrassing to Mr. Gorbachev.

At this stage, we don't know whether Mr. Gordievski's defection was a last-minute decision on his part, or whether he had been working for the British for some months. In the latter case, he will have had time to provide detailed documentation, which will make his information all the more valuable.

Cord Meyer was the Central Intelligence Agency's chief of station in London — a position equivalent to that of the KGB resident — from 1973 to 1976.